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Oral History Interview with ~~Bill~~ BARRY Schmidt
May 21, 2010
By Evelyn McClure
With Steve Stedman comments

B: (commenting on changes in Sebastopol) I couldn't believe the amount of cars that are parked on the street. When I was growing up they didn't have all these vehicles, which during the War you couldn't buy gas – there weren't any tires. So people had to drive very slowly, very carefully to get the best gas mileage they could, not wear out their tires because there weren't any. They had their little round red coupon tokens they gave you and everything was rationed.

E: Everybody has more vehicles – multiple vehicles per household and then their garages are full of stuff – so that's why they are out on the street.

B: We had only one garage. There was usually only one car per house.

E: Tell me how your family started in Sonoma County, when did they arrive?

B: I was born in 1937 and if I recall correctly they arrived in the early 1930s. I don't know which year, could have been 1935 or earlier. My father started with Safeway in San Anselmo at the beginning of the Depression, he somehow got assigned to the store up here in Sebastopol.

E: Where did your family come from originally? Outside of California.

B: My mother's family was basically from Washington State. We're going to a 30,000 member family reunion at McMinnville (Oregon?) in three months. My father's family came from Illinois. But his father came from Berlin in 1885. When his grandfather was 15. I have no idea where his parents, if they came over from Germany. My mother was raised in Washington State.
Dad started working with Safeway and he stayed with Safeway until 1946 at which time my mother was getting restless and she wanted to go out on her own so she noticed Borba's store/business was for sale. How she found that out I have no idea. I was 8 or 9 years old.

E: In 1946 was Bill Borba going to retire?

B: Bill and his wife, Willow ran the store but Willow had her fingers in running the business per se. Bill's "bag" so to speak was the photo processing so he did all the photo processing and she did the rest of it. However I don't know if their business was taking a downturn or they were just getting too old or what. They decided to bail. Willow was a very – not a people person and the salesman, I recall my mother telling me, did not like to go into the store because Willow was not a pleasant person outwardly anyway, to deal with so they didn't like to go into the store. But after my mother took over, my mother was very gregarious and loved people as did my father. She told the salesman before she

bought anything, her expertise was gifts for some reason and she told them "I don't know anything about buying, where to buy it, what sells, what doesn't sell" and so she threw herself at their feet and they most wonderfully accommodated her. So she was able to buy what sold and what people wanted and they ended up selling school supplies, pens, Ronson lighters which my Dad would put people's initials on. You know fountain pens that use ink. Eversharp was one of the brands and they sold all kinds of gifts and lines of greeting cards, freezer supplies, office supplies.

E: One of those basic things you need in a community, which we don't have. We have Long's but giving extra service really helps I'm sure.

B: They ran the store themselves and ultimately hired a friend of theirs, Jo Oliver. Jo and her husband, Tony, had a 5 acre parcel on Vine Hill School Road.

E: Did your family live in town?

B: Lived two blocks up on Wilton Ave. 7300 (now) used to be 400. At the corner of Wilton and West. I was born a block away at the corner of Strout and West St. in the house. Why I was born in the house I have no idea.

E: Maybe we didn't have a hospital then?

B: We did have a hospital. It was called Hillside. 1937, so in 1939 when I was two, my father and a man named John Morawetz who used to work for Manzana, built the house on Wilton Ave. Just those two men it took two to three months to build it and the house is still there and John lived right across the street opposite West Street and that house is also still there. To get back to the store, my mother and father made a success out of it and they were able to retire when my father was 58 and my mother was 52. They sold it to the Otts and they sold it to the Jordan's. My dad was manager of Safeway when it was at the old Bodega Ave and South Main St. intersection and then they built the new Safeway right behind the telephone office which I believe is not there any longer on Main Street at the corner of Main and Wilton and that's where the second store was and where Rite Aide (is). The third location was across from the Methodist Church. My grandparents on my mother's side, the Cox'es had a used furniture store and my grandfather also sharpened saws. That's all gone, it was around the corner from Martin's nursery and that's gone too.

E: What were your parent's first names?

B: Albert Bernard Schmidt and Dorothy

E: About your school days, You went to grammar school here?

B: At Parkside at the time was the only school in town. Pinecrest wasn't in the cards at the time. Parkside (the school Bill attended) was built I think in 1936. The old school with a basement and two stories was still there. And so that school had the kindergarten

and 2nd and 1st classes. When you went into 2nd grade you went into the "new" school. I graduated there in 1950 and went to Analy. There was no junior high school.

(Steve Stedman interjects): (where the junior high is now/Brookhaven) the (?) family grew berries there. Past the Army housing there on Valentine.

B: So that's the Northwest side of town. When I was growing up that was all grass. Was it Bob Burdo(?)

SS: yes

B: It's hard for me to relate we came back here today and see all these places even the streets were changed. Went up McFarlane. It was called Hayden. Well Hayden used to be McFarlane.
McFarlane use to start at Litchfield went up and made a hairpin turn and High Street used to be High (?), Vine, Calder, Burnett, same. High school days started in 1950 graduated in 1954. 600 students total when I graduated. 150 in our class or so. El Molino wasn't around.

E: Were you involved with music or sports?

B: I was in a band for 4 years playing drums and still do. Had regular curriculum. I was a terrible student. I just wasn't interested in high school. I did just enough to get by. My parents were always on my back and I had to take piano lessons from an elderly lady. I just wasn't interested in it and she had me play all this stuff.

E: Do you play piano now?

B: No, I can a little I've forgotten most of it.

E: What did you do after high school?

B: I went to … joined the Air Force January 1955 because January 30th of that same year all the college benefits were going out so many of my buddies who didn't have any goals and I was in that same group did the same thing. And got out in November 1958. When In the Air Force I took the test to go to OCS and flunked. I looked within myself and thought I have to go to college. I got out just short of 4 years and went back to Junior college and got a degree in business administration. At the JC. Associate arts degree and went to San Francisco State and got a bachelors in business administration and then after I graduated went to U.S. Steel as a cost accountant trainee for a year. Hated it. While I was there the guy next to me said his brother in law was a dentist and those buys have it made so I thought that means I'd have to go back to school for umpteen years. It was funny because at the same time some people who had been with my parent in Mexico, my parents used to go down there six months out of the year to a little place they had in Manzanilla and they met this dentist and his practice happened to be in Concord which was close to where we were living when I worked for U.S. Steel in Pittsburgh, CA. So

they invited us to dinner, my wife and I. He was kind and gracious and we started talking about dentistry and since I wasn't happy at U.S. Steel my career was up in the air so I looked into it. Went to SF State and found out what requirements were needed for dental school. Since I'd just graduated shortly before I found out I needed a tremendous amount of science courses. Business Admin. Doesn't give you a lot of science. Luckily I liked math and I took all kinds of match even as electives. I went to SF State 2 year's pre dental and got those courses out of the way and ended up at the Detroit School of Dentistry.

E: Aren't there dental schools in CA?

B: Well they were either too expensive. I was on an alternate list at Cal and they wouldn't let me know if I was in or not. In the meantime I'd been accepted by three other schools because to cover your bases you don't know where you're going to end up. I applied to different schools.

E: Is it cheaper to be an out of state student somewhere else?

B: In this case it was. I paid $600 a semester/a month's pay at that time and University of Detroit was reported to be a quite good school so I was 32 graduated, practiced 35 years in Santa Rosa and 5 years ago I retired. Most of that time was very enjoyable. I kind of miss it from time to time.

E: You were a young boy growing up here in War years. What was it like here during WWII?

B: In WWII there was always shortages. I remember there was always some type of drive, pots and pans, they were bit on tinfoil. We didn't have aluminum then. Saving tinfoil – chewing gum wrappers had tinfoil on one side. You couldn't buy tinsel made of metal, it was made of cellophane. Toys, forget it, they didn't make bicycles. Keds, anything with rubber. We had to wear out our shoes, denims. We had ration books. I remember my father since he was manager of Safeway people thought he'd be able to get just about whatever he wants. That wasn't so. My Dad was a member of the Masonic order here and a very honest guy. He played right by the book. As far as toys went they didn't have it for 4-5 years when I was growing up once in awhile they'd get something at the 5 and dime. But by and large, it got so bade I remember there were little wooden cars with pieces of linoleum for wheels tacked on with little tacks and that was it. One time, God Bless the Fire Dept., my dad was a volunteer, the Fire Men went out got some old prewar toys and painted them so one year was a dump truck painted battleship grey and my father brought this thing home and I thought this was marvelous. Bicycles they put old ones together and patched the patches, couldn't buy tires and had a bicycle store here in town named Trainor's. Mr. Trainor sold bikes put as the War kept going he went out of business.

E: Did you ever do anything like fishing in the Laguna?

B: We went fishing in the lagoon. There were a lot of carp nobody wanted carp. We'd catch them and throw them back. Crawdads same thing. We had several rafts off the city dump. Which I believe is now occupied by the Community Center. It was behind the high school and we'd go down there with a 22 (rifle) and shoot rats. There were thousands of rats at the city jump. Why in God's name they didn't invade the town is beyond me. At night they'd come out. After I got out of the service however I came back to go down and try out my expertise at shooting rats. The city of Sebastopol had poisoned all the rats. So that took care of that diversion. The Libby center (at the high school9 was not there at Analy when I was going to school.

E: The library?

B: That used to be the old boy and girl's gym. The new gym was built kind of below it. I was also on the ground observer corps, after the War during the Cold War. This was when I was in high school 1950-54. They had a tower. I know right where it was on the corner. The girl's Lacrosse or soccer field. The one that butts up to the street that goes past the Masonic Lodge (Taft Street). We had the responsibility of calling in altitudes and direction and general location of these aircraft. I can't remember I think it was there during the dark hours. I know it was there during the daytime if you were in High School you could go up there and do that. My Dad belonged to it and that kind of fizzled out.

E: Why did they do it after the War?

B: During the war no Japanese, nobody was a threat not till after the war the Russians got the atomic bomb. We had long-range radar but there were holes in the radar. It wasn't as advanced as it is today so they wanted somebody to actually be there to find out where the potential threat was if at all. This was during the year that people all over were building these underground bomb shelters. As I recall there wasn't a lot of attention paid to it but one person/one family was Jack Pilgrim, he was the assistant police chief. He built a bomb shelter right where his house was.

E: Wonder it it's still there?

B: I don't know. But I remember Jack was not exactly a people person either, some kids put some BB gun holes in his front window. I think he was under Johnny Ellis. But when I was here there were only 3 police officers. There was a little guy on a 3 wheel Harley Davidson who rode around giving tickets, that's all he did. We didn't have crime or a drug problem. Worse think that could happen in high school was some kids getting high on some wine or beer. And even then it wasn't done very much. If course I was pretty pure anyway. I towed the line. My parents, my father (was tough) good years to grow up. You rode bicycles all over the place or walked. I'd hitchhike out to Bodega Bay with a friend of mine and we'd fish off the dock. When A. (Palinini?) was there, Lucas Wharf. I did a lot of stuff my parents would have gasped at had they known. I didn't tell them especially …going on that raft on the lagoon when I was 10 or 11. My mother would have had a fit. She didn't know about it.

E: How high was the water ? At the rainy season it could flood and get pretty high.

B: During the winter generally it's about 40-50 feet across, fairly deep. In summer time it didn't change it was pretty much the same. It bordered Mr. Kimes's property. I don't think they have it anymore – it's in grapes. When Kimes' was there it was on the East side of the lagoon. And Jack Dei's property was on the West side of the lagoon. And they were both dairy ranches and Mr. Dei did not like you to go down there particularly to shoot ducks which was what some of my older friends did. I didn't have a shotgun. And you had to have big rubber wading boots.

E: He probably was worried about his cows getting shot.

B: I think that was it so he was touchy about that.

E: That's amazing that family has been there a long time. They're still there.

B: I went to school with both their kids. Jim and Jack Jr. one younger and one older.

E: Can you think of any other stories about growing up in and living in Sebastopol?

B: I think everything was self-contained here. We didn't have to travel much to Santa Rosa. I remember ice cream cones at Moran's pool hall, absolutely delicious. I think it was called Golden State (ice cream) my mother said don't go down to that pool hall. I said I just wanted ice cream, she said don't do it. I did it anyway. They have a single scoop. Mr. Moran was bartender. A whole bunch of pool tables so I'd go there cost us a dime, they didn't have 5 cent cones but the scoop was huge, the size of a grapefruit. Some of the most colorful people were down there.

E: Adults?

B: And a few of my friends older than I. But the main thrust of going in there was getting ice cream. Then there was another place in town that sold ice cream but there were two smaller scoops for a dime but the ice cream wasn't as good. Besides you couldn't watch them play pool.

E: How many saloons or bars were there in town?

B: Don's Bar, on the west side of the street, not too far from here. The Blue Room as I recall had a bowling alley too or maybe the bowling alley was next door. I think it was associated with the Blue Room some way. Moran's pool Hall, I think it was just called Moran's. I do remember having some movie film at home, don't know where. Family movies, my father had an 8MM camera an inveterate take of movies. (Bill makes some comments about Japanese internment) . . . and families returning post war. El Rey children's audience, because of several movies.)." every week for 13 weeks they'd have a different serial in many instances would have to do with the Nazi's. Germans. And the sergeant in charge was always named Schmidt so I thought just my luck, everytime I saw

these I'd slink down in my seat. I guess I only noticed, none of my friends brought it up. No TV until 1949. Had to put an antenna on the roof. We got a TV about 1953. I remember watching all the junk and my grades went to pot. The As to Ds. I was glued to the TV rather than the radio. My parents were working, I'd get home from school, I was 15, and flip on the TV. But at night they made me study. I remember a lot of comic books that were ten cents apiece. I'd buy those, took a dollar and buy ten. I wish I'd saved them. They're worth a fortune now. 2600 people (population) when I lived here. All apples, apple industry was a big deal. East of this building (West County Museum/P&SR depot) was a packinghouse owned by Morrie Hart and partner was Mr. Rogers (was a member of the Masonic Lodge)

E: Do you remember the packing operation where Ives Park is now?

B: Yes where the Vets Building is. They went defunct.

E: A cooperative?

B: SAGU, could have been an offshoot as I recall, the apple growers union was north of town corner of Hy. 116 and Occidental Road. Speas downtown, you could hear some kind of steam engine it would go chunk –chunk. When things were quiet you could hear the train at Santa Rosa on a quiet night. Train whistle and trucks going up Healdsburg Avenue. When you're a kid you think everything is big and as an adult . . .on a much smaller scale.
No freeway, came in 1955 and everything was two lanes. My father would drive and he hated to have people in front of him. (a tractor) every one would honk their horns, now people are polite. There are (also) more lanes. They had a dryer, Santa Rosa Avenue, Highway 12, an apple dryer over there. Bill Knight, past mayor or Santa Rosa grew up here, we went to school together. Good times, jazz band at Analy, Keck Knight, was director, Bill's Dad.

End.